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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

31 JULY 1980

MEMORANDUM

ANGOLA: POLITICAL SITUATION

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There has been some restructuring and shifting of power in the Angolan Government during the ten months that have elapsed since President Neto's death last September. The issues that faced Neto persist. The problems may be more serious because no government leader seems to have the talent or authority to deal with them.

Internally, the government is facing numerous political, economic, and social problems--the most serious of which is the continuing insurgency by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and ethnic and ideological factionalism within the ruling group. These problems will not be resolved in the near future.

The ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) also is plagued by debilitating international problems that must be resolved before the government can secure its hold on the country and turn its attention to economic development. The most serious of these is the Namibian issue and continuing South African military incursions into Angola. Prospects for the resolution of these problems are dim, but the Angolan Government hopes that a settlement of the Namibian issue can be reached during the coming months. The Namibian issue is central to several of the other problems facing the MPLA Government.

This memorandum, requested by the National Intelligence Officer for Africa, was prepared by Africa Division, Office of Political Analysis. It was coordinated with the Directorate for Operations and the Office of Strategic Research. Research for this paper was completed on 30 July 1980. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to Chief, Africa Division, OPA, on

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Background

Since Neto's death we have been able to decipher the outlines of the new power structure in Angola, but we have little hard information on the attitudes of the new leaders on such important issues as relations with Cuba and the Soviets and the quest for improved relations with the West.

By Angolan standards President Neto was a moderate. Although he frequently declared his allegiance to Marxism-Leninism, Neto generally was a pragmatic socialist. He was moving toward a closer relationship with the West and was purging the party and government of those who disagreed with him. His goals apparently included reorganizing the government at the national and provincial levels, accommodating black demands for more power while filling key positions with individuals who shared his views, securing the country's northern and southern frontiers by making accommodations with Angola's neighbors, and taking a more earnest look at the possibility of a peaceful resolution to the UNITA insurgency in the southern part of the country. Neto also was attempting to move Angola toward truer nonalignment.

Some MPLA leaders became concerned that the government would lose its revolutionary zeal and that Neto's desire to seek an accommodation with the West was a betrayal of the Angolan revolution. But there apparently was little overt opposition to Neto's actions within the ruling group--an uneasy coalition of ethnic antagonists with conflicting ideological views.

The Situation in Luanda

Little information is available on the ideological orientation of Jose Eduardo Dos Santos, Angola's new President. Much of the information on him and other influential members of the country's political elite is contradictory. Although it is generally believed that Dos Santos was associated with Neto's opening to the West, the new President, a Soviet-educated black, is more left-leaning than his predecessor. Dos Santos does not appear to be a hardline Marxist, however, and he is an acceptable choice to Angola's major factions--at least for the time being.

Although Dos Santos has sought to continue most of his predecessor's policies, he lacks the authority to take new initiatives on issues that deeply divide the MPLA. Dos Santos'

position is not yet secure. Some observers believe that he is an indecisive leader and that his longterm prospects for survival are not good. Dos Santos only recently has begun to mold his government and secure his position. Last month he shuffled his cabinet in an apparent effort to consolidate power before the MPLA congress scheduled for the end of the year. Additional cabinet shifts can be expected, which may provide an indication of Dos Santos' direction.

Increasing Incoherence

Intraparty divisions reportedly are worsening, and there is a growing restiveness among the general population because of deteriorating economic conditions. The President's political survival will be determined by the manner in which he handles these issues.

Angola's blacks have long been dissatisfied with the disproportionate power wielded by the country's mulattoes, and since Neto's death they have stepped up their efforts to assert themselves. The black nationalist "Catete Group" could move to unseat the Dos Santos government in the coming months if its adherents believe the President is not responsive to their wishes. They also may attempt to elect one of their members to the presidency during the MPLA congress in December. Other individuals and groups--both civilian and military--with varying degrees of support also may be emerging. Efforts by competing factions to gain greater power could give way to violence. Since contenders for power would be likely to seek support from the Soviets or Cubans, Havana and Moscow would play a crucial role in an internal power struggle.

Dos Santos is aware of the possible challenges to his rule. Although he will attempt to avoid direct confrontation, he probably will take steps to divide and weaken potential opponents during the next few months.

Foreign Influence

The Soviets--whose relations with Neto were strained--appear to be firmly behind Dos Santos. We believe their influence in Luanda has increased since Neto's death.

The Cubans' position in Angola appears to have slipped in recent months. Dos Santos' visit to Havana last March did not go well, and there were signs of personal friction

with Castro. There also were indications of differences over Afghanistan and the use of Cuban forces in Angola. The Angolan populace is antagonistic toward the Cubans, and friction between Angolan and Cuban troops persists.

Nevertheless, the Cubans are committed to Angola, and no significant reduction in the Cuban military presence can be expected before a Namibian settlement is reached and a modus vivendi achieved with UNITA.

The Angolan Government is firmly committed to SWAPO, but would like to establish a demilitarized zone on the Angola-Namibia frontier. The MPLA could take a tougher line on Namibia, however, in the face of continuing South African attacks and Soviet pressure to resist seeking a settlement.

Some MPLA members would like to reduce the Soviet and Cuban presence in Angola and lessen Luanda's dependence on the bloc. Many of these are disappointed with the lack of a positive US response to initiatives seeking to establish diplomatic relations. US reluctance to normalize relations--because of the Cuban presence--has weakened the position of moderates in the MPLA.

On the other hand, the increasing frequency and intensity of South African incursions into Angola, together with the debate in the US over modification of the Clark Amendment that restricts US assistance to Angolan factions has strengthened the hand of the hardliners in the MPLA and reinforced the conviction of some Angolans that the US intends to destabilize their government. In recent months, Angolan officials have increased their verbal attacks on the US.

Barring a coup or assassination of Dos Santos, there probably will be no drastic changes in Angolan foreign policy until after the party congress in December. We believe Angola will continue to seek contacts with the West primarily for economic reasons--but the country will remain basically dependent upon Cuba and other Communist countries for security assistance. Reacting out of frustration, the regime could adopt a harder line toward the West in an effort to demonstrate its ideological purity and commitment to the revolution.

Unanswered Questions

-- We do not know the degree of consensus within the MPLA in regard to plans for a demilitarized zone on the Angolan-Namibian frontier or plans to improve Angola's relations with the West.

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